

**COUNCIL**  
**16 JULY 2020**

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**OVERVIEW OF ECONOMY PORTFOLIO**

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1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Economy Portfolio.

**Planning, Development Management and Environmental Health**

2. One of the large housing sites between Burtree Lane and the A167 has moved closer to commencement as they have signed their S.106 legal agreement. Development on the early phases of Stag House Farm including the link road are underway.
3. Further work is being undertaken relating to the Development Management Charter, which sets out the reasonable expectations of both developers and objectors within the Development Management System. This is an important document which sets out how the development process operates in an open and transparent manner. In addition, a report is being finalised which will form a new planning enforcement protocol. This will demonstrate how we deal with planning matters when things go wrong within the planning process. A report will be brought to Members of the Planning Committee for consideration when complete.
4. A planning application has been approved for the refurbishment of the crematorium with associated chapel and facilities.
5. Further negotiations are continuing with regard to the Burtree Garden Village Government designation.
6. The Development Management process is continuing to operate as normal, including the delegated process and Chair delegated process, despite most members of staff working from home. The interim consultation processes that were introduced initially following the lockdown have now been reinstated and are operating as normal.
7. The Planning Committee which has been paused during the lockdown is anticipated to re commence 'virtually' towards the end of July. The operational details of how this occurs is still being finalised.
8. The Planning enforcement/compliance service is now working as normal including site visits seeking to resolve planning disputes and breaches. Members of the public can access this service either via our web site or contacting the officer via his telephone.
9. Environmental Health have been operating a near "normal" service during COVID 19 and continued throughout to investigate and respond to service requests across all our service areas.

10. Since the lockdown period started on 23 March 2020 and to the end of May 2020, officers in Environmental Health have dealt with 154 additional enquiries relating to the social distancing issues and business closure requirements. This work is continuing as well as assistance being given to businesses on re-opening, it is not yet known the impact there may be on the service in investigating outbreaks of COVID 19.
11. Most breaches of the legislation have been resolved informally, however warning letters have been sent to two businesses who were working when they should not have been.
12. A barber has been served with a Prohibition Notice to try to prevent them working, however information has been received that the barber is still working, and further investigations are continuing with regard to this.
13. Environmental Health have noticed an increase in several areas of work during COVID 19 compared to the same period last year with the number of requests for rat treatments (141) increasing by 52%, domestic noise complaints received (71) increasing by 31% with the most noticeable increase being in relation to nuisance from garden bonfires (47) an increase of 176%.

### **Business Growth & Investment**

14. The commencement of lock down brought many challenges to the economic life of Darlington. Since lockdown was introduced, the Business Investment team has received 168 enquiries from businesses seeking advice and support. The majority of these enquiries were seeking financial assistance.
15. The Business Investment team have worked alongside Business Rates to promote and support the update of the emergency cash grants introduced by Government. Initially, this was focussed on the Small Business Grant and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant. This was then followed up with the Discretionary Business Grant Scheme.
16. Alongside this direct support, the Business Investment Team have been providing advice and guidance to a range of support services to help our businesses community, particularly in relation to the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.
17. The Business Investment Team have also been engaged in the development and implementation of a number of recovery plans, both at a strategic and local level e.g. Town Centre Recovery Planning, Tees Valley LEP Recovery Planning.
18. Throughout this crisis, a large number of Darlington employers have made significant contributions to the response to the pandemic, making a real impact in supporting local residents and vulnerable communities. Examples include:
  - (a) The Mowden Pub, who spent the entire lockdown cooking and delivering free homemade food to vulnerable people
  - (b) Cleveland Bridge UK has launched a new workplace initiative to support the King's Church Foodbank in Darlington

(c) Darlington College have provided essential PPE supplies to Darlington Memorial Hospital and St Teresa's Hospice

19. Amazon are fully operational with over 1500 people now employed on site. From the recruitment that has taken place, around 50% of new employees have been recruited from Darlington and the biggest employment has been in the 18-27 age range with around 50% of the work force falling into this demographic. We are continuing to work closely with them and are hopeful further recruitment will take place over the coming months in anticipation of the Christmas trading period.
20. CPI, on behalf of the Bioindustry Association (BIA)-led vaccine manufacturing group, is leading the work stream to manufacture the Imperial College London Coronavirus vaccine candidate. This includes establishing the scaleup and development of the vaccine platform technology, which will ultimately allow for the manufacture of the millions of doses required as soon as the vaccine candidate passes clinical trials.

### **Business Support Grants**

21. During the lockdown period, we have awarded 2,049 Business Support Grants to local businesses worth £23.26 million. This has ensured that Darlington has outperformed most other Councils by delivering these grants promptly and in line with Government guidelines. We are currently in the process of delivering the agreed Discretionary Business Grant scheme to provide further help to Darlington businesses.
22. Business Rates discounts worth £16.40 million have been awarded to 667 local retail, hospitality and leisure businesses, providing a full exemption for Business Rates in 2020-21.
23. On 28 May, the Council launched the Government Funded Discretionary Grants Scheme for small businesses. This scheme is aimed at small businesses with ongoing fixed property-related costs. The Council were allocated circa £1.2m by Government. Applications for the first round of Discretionary Grants closed on 11 June 2020. The Council has awarded and paid 89 discretionary grants totalling £890,000. The unallocated balance will now support a second round of Discretionary Grant Applications.

### **Future High Street Fund**

24. The Council submitted its Future High Street Fund bid to Government on 3 June. Darlington Borough Council is seeking £7.7m of Future High Street Fund (FHSF) monies as part of a £32.8m high quality housing led regeneration scheme to transform the town centre. The scheme is critical in delivering a 'living town centre' in Darlington, a primary aim of the Town Centre Strategy. The scheme is focused on the Crown Street and East Street area of the town centre. It builds on earlier master planning work that highlighted the opportunity for a town centre housing scheme that regenerates vacant sites and premises and exploits the potential to open-up the River Skerne via high quality public realm improvements. The scheme will provide a mix of tenancies while also contributing towards Darlington's need to increase the number of affordable homes; meet ambitious housing need targets; and deliver our vision for an attractive and vibrant, transformed town centre.

## **Darlington Indoor Market**

25. In April 2020 Market Asset Management (MAM) obtained planning approval to commence the refurbishment of the Indoor Market. Work will entail repair and maintenance of the market roof, the redesign of the current stall layout, installation of public toilets, access improvements, enhancement of the west elevation of the building and the introduction of number food and beverage operators. MAM are currently completing the required procurement and tender exercises for the work and it is anticipated that work will commence in September.

## **Local Plan**

26. The Local Plan remains suspended as in the current climate I am advised that the Council could not meet the legal requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations 2012. The Plan will progress when the requirements can be met either when measures allow or if the Government amend the legislation.

27. At the time of writing the Planning Policy team is currently operating on a reduced staffing level due to two members of staff securing different employment, one member of staff seconded to the Garden Communities role and one member of staff on maternity leave. The remaining staff are carrying out a business as usual, preparing background evidence for the Local Plan Examination, responding to planning application consultations, assisting in planning appeals, carrying out plan monitoring and assisting Middleton St. George in the preparation of their Neighbourhood Plan.

## **Climate Change**

28. The Council is continuing to work towards increasing its energy efficiency and reduce its carbon footprint. Actions already completed include:-

- (a) Switching to a zero-carbon electricity tariff
- (b) Installation of new LED streetlighting
- (c) Installation of LED lighting in office buildings
- (d) Addition of nine electric vehicles to the Council fleet
- (e) Climate Change Champions have been appointed across the Council

29. The Climate Change Strategy has been agreed by Cabinet as well as a training module for all staff.

30. The four main principles of the Climate Change Strategy are:-

- (a) Reduce our overall energy consumption
- (b) Reduce our demand for fossil fuel-based energy
- (c) Contribute to a greener grid
- (d) Sequester carbon (offsetting)

31. Work is continuing on the development of a rolling Carbon action plan.

### **Cross Party Working Group**

32. Five meetings of the cross-party working group have taken place. Much of the business has been fact finding, including:-

- (a) an overview of local authority housing and current building standards
- (b) the benefits of a 20mph speed limit for the urban area
- (c) an update in respect of tree coverage in the Borough and ongoing tree planting schemes
- (d) Durham County Council's approach to achieving its carbon target

### **District Heating System**

33. A bid has been approved for grant funding to carry out a Techno-economic Feasibility Study for a potential District Heating System in the Borough. If the results are positive the next stage would be to prepare a detailed project submission.

**Councillor Alan Marshall**  
**Economy Portfolio**